

Appl. No. : 10/665,693
Filed : September 17, 2003

REMARKS

By way of summary, Claims 1-23 were previously pending. The Examiner did not enter the previously offered amendments after final. Claims 1, 10, and 14 are amended herein. Thus, Claims 1-23 remain pending. In view of the following remarks, Applicants respectfully request entry of the amendments and reconsideration of the claims.

Amendments

Applicants have amended independent Claims 1 and 14 to recite that the buffer station is purgeable “separately from” from the adjacent substrate handling chamber. Applicants submit the amendments are fully supported by the application as filed and introduces no new matter. The amendments merely clarify the characteristics of the recited buffer stations.

The same amendments are incorporated into Claim 10 in the course of rewriting the claim in independent form.

Additionally, as noted below, Applicants have amended independent Claim 1 to omit reference to being “between” the load lock and docking port.

Response to Rejection Under 35 U.S.C. §112, Second Paragraph

The Examiner rejected Claim 1 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention. Applicants respectfully submit that the presently pending claims comply with the requirements of 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph.

Applicants have amended Claim 1 to omit recitation of the buffer station being “located between the loadlock chamber and the front docking port.”

Thus, applicants submit that the rejection of Claim 1 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph is overcome.

The Pending Claims Are Allowable Over Cited References

The Examiner rejected Claims 1-13 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,481,956 issued to Hofmeister in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,395,094 issued to

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Tanaka et al. (“Tanaka”). Claims 14-16 and 18-23 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 5,989,346 issued to Hiroki in view of Tanaka.

Applicants respectfully traverse the rejections and submit that the Examiner has provided no suggestion from the prior art to perform the asserted combinations.

In each rejection, a primary reference (Hofmeister or Hiroki) having an asserted of buffer rack or cassette is asserted, in which the buffer rack differs from the presently claimed invention in not being “adjacent” the recited substrate handling chamber. Accordingly, in each of the rejections, the Examiner asserts a combination with the secondary reference Tanaka, buffers 44, 46 (cooling and preheating stations) which are “adjacent” to the recited substrate handling chamber. The asserted suggestion for the combination is “to enhance utilizing efficiencies.”

Applicants submit that there was no motivation for combining either of the primary references with the locations of buffers 44, 46 of Tanaka. The pending claims and the primary references each teach buffer racks configured for holding *multiple* substrates. Tanaka, by way of contrast, shows only a single wafer position for each illustrate wafer holding structure in his buffer 44 or 46 (see Figure 3). Furthermore, there is no indication anywhere in the reference that the asserted “efficiencies” would obtain at all, nor that Tanaka would work for it’s intended benefit, if the single position 44 or 46 were replaced with multiple-wafer racks.

It is important to note that the benefits derived from Tanaka’s buffer 44, 46 position relate to the function of preheating and cooling. Without these functions, there would be no motivation for the illustrated locations. These functions are intimately tied to the sequence of movement and processing for *individual* wafers through the system, and the preheating 48 or cooling mechanisms are also configured for treatment of individual substrates. It is not apparent from any of the references that any benefits obtain for these locations if multiple-position racks were employed at these locations.

Thus, neither the primary references nor the secondary reference contains any suggestion to place buffers with racks for multiple substrates in the recited location. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request withdrawal of the rejections for obviousness.

Appl. No. : 10/665,693
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Conclusion

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants submit that the application is in condition for allowance and respectfully request the same. If, however, some issue remains that the Examiner feels can be addressed by Examiner Amendment, the Examiner is cordially invited to call the undersigned for authorization.

Respectfully submitted,

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